Radical Grace and the Economy

Module II. Denial of Vocation

This is *Section II* of the broader workbook called
Radical Grace and the Economy

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Here's the first of 7 issues we'll discuss in this section:

Consumption vs Vocation

Living on purpose has been replaced with empty consumption.

Issues

- Consumption is Everything
  - ✓ Conventional economics draws our aspirations away from vocation and service, in favour of empty consumption.
  - ✓ In this view, service is just work, endured only to obtain money for consumption goods.
  - ✓ Consumption brings satisfaction — or "utility" — and work is merely a "disutility". Where is your "calling" in that dismal view?
- Looking Outward
  - ✓ People of the spirit look outward with a focus on what they can offer to others.
  - ✓ They seek relationship with their neighbours, family and community.
  - ✓ They desire to serve — to interact creatively in support of the sisters and brothers in their lives.
  - ✓ They have a purpose or a vocation or a calling in their lives.

Discussion Questions

1. How has the ethic of consumption conquered the ethic of vocation?
2. How do we persuade people to serve, not just consume?
3. Does everyone have a unique calling? Do you? How many people even know?

Consumerism vs Resources

Consumerism can overwhelm our means.

Issues

- Rampant Consumerism
  - ✓ We live in an economy of rampant consumerism, inward looking, seeking only personal commodity satisfaction or "utility".
- Prevalent and Addictive
  - ✓ Consumerism is prevalent and addictive, fed by a powerful marketing industry. It's designed to generate unlimited demand which can never be met.
- Overwhelming
  - ✓ The resources of Mother Earth — sufficient to meet everyone's needs but not everyone's greed — are overwhelmed by an avalanche of demand.

Discussion Questions

1. Are we really sitting ducks? Has the marketing industry really turned us all into consumption junkies? How do we fight an addiction to consumption itself? Who do we fight?
2. Why are people so willing to accept that spiralling demand is no big problem for the economy — for society — for the ecology? Or is it still manageable?
3. Can people really turn the corner? Can a culture ruined by consumerism turn around?

Consumerism vs Calling

Consumption for better or for worse.

Issues

- Consumerism is Vulnerable
  - ✓ It has its Achilles' Heel. Consumption for its own sake is meaningless. Consumption junkies run away from its emptiness by means of more consumption — a futile gesture which spirals into nothingness.
- It Consumerism is Futile
  - ✓ Discerning people realize that. Fulfilment arises out of doing — acting in pursuit of one's purpose — not out of taking. The best response to consumerism is to discern that one has a calling — leading one to realize that greater joy found in less consumption
- But Consumption is Necessary
  - ✓ We can't tell someone who doesn't know where their next meal is coming from that consumption is bad. "You rich people can't just tell us to stop consuming — just because you feel guilty about making pigs of yourselves." There's a line between necessary consumption and excess consumption.

Discussion Questions

1. Are people content to consume endlessly? Do they know it's an empty life? Do they feel any discontent? How can we reach them? How can we turn the conversation toward calling?
2. Where do we draw the line? How do we oppose the disorder of consumerism when there are so many people deprived of consumer goods? How can we ask the hungry to do what we won't do?
3. How deep are you into consumer culture? Are you addicted to your smartphone? How discontented are you?

Franciscans are Called

Calling for a new way of living.

Issues

- Rooted in Calling
  - ✓ Franciscan dedication to simple living governed by needs alone is a call to repudiate consumerism, in order to be totally immersed in their vocation of service. Less is more.
- Recognize True Fulfillment
  - ✓ Greater fulfillment comes when one shares what one does not truly need. Self-indulgence and acquisitiveness crowd out God and self-denial is a cleansing that nurtures spiritual health.

Discussion Questions

1. How can less consumption be more satisfying?
2. How many people are open to the idea that self-denial is cleansing and self-fulfilling?
3. Franciscans commit to live simple lives. This is popular in some secular circles. Is that the same thing? Are they allies?

Indigenous on a Different Path

The acquisitive lifestyle is foreign to them.

Issues

- Not so Obsessed with Consumption
  - ✓ Indigenous people do not resonate naturally with consumerism. To be one with the Creator calls on them to refrain from acquisitive behaviour. Tradition teaches them to take only what they need and use all of it.
- Decry Overconsumption
  - ✓ They embrace natural or even sparse living — in order to focus on tending to the needs of "all our relations".
- Seek Harmony
  - ✓ They seek harmony with the creator and the land, and sense that self-indulgence is out of sync with creation.

Discussion Questions

1. Can indigenous counter-culture help us confront predatory consumerism?
2. How does natural living address the needs of all our relations?
3. How is self-indulgence out of sync with creation?

Reframing Consumerism

Digging deeper is a revolution.

Issues

- Challenging the Juggernaut
  - ✓ A more spiritual stance cries out for challenging the juggernaut of hothouse consumerism. All the incentives of our economy direct us powerfully toward self-indulgence.
- Encouraging a Counter-culture
  - ✓ A spiritual stance calls for a re-orientation, directed at those who might respond to the deeper things in life. And it calls for a debunking of the growth mantra as a spiritual corruption that preaches salvation through affluence.
- Revolution of the Spirit
  - ✓ Change lies in a revolution of the spirit that turns hearts and minds toward one's sacred calling — a revolution of re-framing that sours a culture of mass self-indulgence and awakens a drive to service

Discussion Questions

1. Can we take on an obsessive consumerism and self-indulgence and win the battle? Can we pull off a revolution of the spirit or are the affluence junkies too far gone to change?
2. Where do we find those people who are on the fence, uncomfortable with their affluence, and who might question what they've been told and respond to the deeper issues?
3. Are you part of the counter-culture? How can you help create new sensibilities in society?

Dethroning GDP

GDP growth has got to go.

Issues

- GDP Has Got to Go
  - ✓ The path of change also lies in dethroning GDP, the most deceptive possible measure of public welfare, as a public policy goal. Public policy must stop favouring the life of pursuing affluence and support those who would live a modest vocation.
- A Huge Turnaround
  - ✓ That's a huge turnaround in a society that worships material growth — and great reluctance can be expected.
- A Financial Turnaround Too
  - ✓ A first step is to redirect the massive subsidies and incentives that prop up commercial empires — to support instead those endeavours that address public needs above empire building. This is a call to reallocate public resources and incentives to those who would serve others gratuitously. Radical grace demands no less.

Discussion Questions

1. Can GDP growth ever be dethroned when it's been pushed down our throats from day one? Can a population programmed from the start to consume endlessly ever develop a passion for modest vocation?
2. Can government generosity toward financial empires actually be redirected toward community priorities without pushback? From whom? How much of a fight do we have on our hands?
3. Why have you not been programmed to worship growth? Or have you? How do you take a stand in opposition to unconstrained GDP growth?

This is Module II. Denial of Vocation.

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Thank you for participating in the discussion.

The theme of this Workbook speaks of how mainstream economics denies certain key moral or rational values. Hence each module begins with "Denial of …".